

Jim Gold's

ISRAEL GREEK TRAVEL TIPS

Shalom! Salaam! Ahalan!

In just a couple of weeks we will be embarking on an amazing trip to Israel – with an extension to Petra in Jordan! We have an intimate group of wonderful people, many of whom have joined our International Folk Tours in the past, along with new friends who are excited about the kind of experience that we have planned.



As with all of our trips, in addition to seeing many key sights and learning about thousands of years of history, our focus in Israel will be on folk music and folk dancing. We will be meeting Jews and Arabs, Christians and Druze, immigrants from Yemen and Kurdistan, and Kabbalistic mystics. We will learn ethnic Debka dances as well as some of the latest Israeli folk dances. We will have an opportunity to do Balkan and other international folk dances as well. We will learn and sing Israeli songs -- some new and some time-honored – that speak about the places that we visit.



Coming to Israel is always a very special occasion. One simultaneously experiences the past and future challenges of the State. During the time that you are here, you will be seeing Israel from a number of different perspectives, from ancient history to “the here and now.” We will try to help you make sense out of everything that you are seeing and experiencing so that you will be prepared to carry on the learning process when you get back home. We encourage you to be active participants in the tour program - we have found that the more people participate, the more they will get out of the trip.

No matter what your religious background or current proclivity may be, Israel – and by extension Jordan - is the “Holy Land” for most everyone. While this trip is not defined as a “religious” tour or a pilgrimage, we want to be sensitive to the religious/spiritual significance that coming to Israel may have for some or all of you. We have included visits to Christian as well as Jewish holy sites (and we will mention others as well). If you have any special requests in this regard, please don't hesitate to contact us.

PASSPORT/S: We suggest that you double-check the expiration date of your passport, which should be valid for at least 6 months past the departure date from the USA. We recommend that you make two xerox copies of your passport/s. Keep one copy at home where

someone could find it in an emergency, and bring the other copy with you – but keep it separate from your passport. This way you will be covered if – God forbid – your passports are misplaced. Similarly, you might want to leave Xerox copies – or at least lists – of any credit cards or other valuable documents that you carry with you.

ARRIVAL: Money Matters: After landing in Tel Aviv and going through customs, you will have a bit of waiting time until your bags come up. During that time you might want to use the facilities (you know what we mean!) and change some dollars into NIS (New Israeli Shekels) at one of the change booths, so that you will have some ready cash for quick meals and incidentals. We recommend starting with \$100 worth or more. The current official exchange rate is a little over NIS 4 to the dollar. The actual rate you would get anywhere you change should be close to 4 shekels. You can also opt to take money out of the ATM machines; however, you check with your bank or credit card company what the service charges will be. Most restaurants and stores will take major credit cards (Visa, Mastercard, AmEx, Diners...but not Discovery), but you will want to have cash for a quick falafel, hummus, or drink.

HEALTH: As mentioned on the packing list provided below, we recommend bringing ample prescription medicines for the whole trip. To be on the safe side, bring along the generic names of the medicines you take in the event that you need to get them while you are here. You should also be sure to bring along proof of medical insurance (e.g., Blue Cross card...). To stay healthy while in flight and while in Israel drink lots of water. Even though you are coming while it is still winter time, dehydration is still something to be concerned about. (We'll make as many pit stops as necessary along the way!) The rule of thumb is: if you haven't peed in 3 hours, you aren't drinking enough. Another way to stay healthy is to wear a hat and put on sunscreen whenever you are outside in the day time. The sun rays are much hotter than you are used to. Do not believe the "Buba Maysas" (Yiddish for "grandmother tales") that you don't need sunscreen by the Dead Sea!

WHAT TO BRING: A suggested packing list appears below. This is only a recommendation, and it is always a good idea to pack light (*easier said than done!*). Make sure you include some modest clothes to be worn at some specific sites. Also be sure to bring a backpack/daypack with you on each day, to hold a water bottle, booklet of songs and sources that we will provide, hat, camera, and other things you might need throughout the day (as well, be sure to bring sunscreen!). Each evening Joe the Guide will let you know what specific equipment you should have with you on the next day's tour.

Note: If you have not done so already, you might want to consider taking out Trip Insurance.

READING: Without exaggeration, just about *anything* that you read about Israel or Jordan will enhance and enrich your trip. Besides reading whatever you can before the trip, we recommend that you bring along one or more of these books on the trip. While you won't have a lot of free time, it is gratifying to be reading *about* Israel even as you explore it for yourself. Following are just a few "classics" (you can find them in most public libraries, at major bookstores, or trace them on the Internet). The Source, by

James Michener (Follow thousands of years of Israel's history through the use of an archaeological tel)

Exodus, by Leon Uris (The eternal novel of the struggle for the creation of the State of Israel; if you haven't seen the movie it's worth renting the DVD, it would make an excellent preparation for the whole family. Have plenty of food on hand, it's long!)

O, Jerusalem! By Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre (A novel-like retelling of the history of the battles for Jerusalem in 1948. Allowing for some inaccuracies of two journalists it is an excellent overview and intriguing reading.)

The Case for Israel, by Alan Dershowitz (A terrific reference and very helpful in refuting cases made against Israel by the Arab world, the international press, etc.)

The Case for Peace, by Alan Dershowitz (His newest book in which he spells out his ideas for achieving peace in the Middle East).

News and the Internet: The best way to find out what is going on in Israel right now is by reading The Jerusalem Report (bi-weekly) or the weekly international edition of The Jerusalem Post or the English version of Haaretz. The Jerusalem Report can be found on the Internet at www.jrep.com; The Post's site is www.jpost.co.il. In addition, the English edition of Ha' Aretz can be found at: <http://www.haaretzdaily.com/> . You might also have a look at the site of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which offers historical and geographic background as well as updated information about the country in general. Their home page can be found at www.israel-mfa.gov.il .

SUGGESTED PACKING LIST FOR ISRAEL

Winter weather in Israel is totally unpredictable (so what else is new?!). It can be quite pleasant (shirt-sleeve weather or warmer) or cold and rainy. It could even snow in Jerusalem or the Galilee! **While the temperature rarely goes below the mid-30sF, it can** be windy and quite chilly. In general, buildings are not heated the way they are in North America. We plan to tour outdoors in all weather (unless it is really pouring); proper gear is thus essential. The

“trick” is to wear layers that can be peeled off or put on as the temperature changes. Better to “shlep” along and not have to use it, than to be caught off guard. The list below is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to remind you of essential items to bring. (In packing, keep in mind that laundry service is available at an extra cost.)

TYPES OF CLOTHING:

In addition to everyday clothing, you will need:

*Modest attire for the holy sites (long sleeves and skirts/long pants); men will need a head-covering (hat or yarmulke) at Jewish holy sites.

*Clothing that can get sweaty/dirty/torn: for dancing, digging, caving, camel riding (long pants preferable)

*Comfortable clothes and shoes for dancing

*Comfortable walking shoes for all programs & activities

REMEMBER TO PACK:

*Toiletries (toothpaste, toothbrush, comb, brush, deodorant, personal items)

*Underwear and socks; Pajamas/sleepwear

*Rain slicker/poncho; Umbrella (one that folds into a compact size)

*Winter coat/gloves/scarf/hat

*Long sleeved shirts

*Long pants

*Sweaters/sweatshirts

*Sunglasses/ suntanscreen/ hat

*An extra pair of glasses/contact lenses

***MEDICINES** (over-the-counter: anti-diarrhea, Tylenol, cold medicine, band aids, etc.)

Note: be sure to bring enough of your own prescription medicines. While your own doctor’s prescription may not be honored at an Israeli pharmacy, be sure that you have an accurate list of generic names of any prescription drugs in case you need to get some here.

* Proof of medical insurance (e.g., Blue Cross card...)

FOR THE DEAD SEA AND SOUTH:

*One pair of shorts & a few short sleeved shirts

*Bathing suit. We also recommend water shoes (not flip-flops) for entering the Dead Sea.

OPTIONAL:*Camera, film, batteries

*Fanny pack

*Laundry bag

*Canteen, or carrying case for water bottle

*Binoculars

*Shavers/hair dryers (Israeli current is 220V/50 cycles; most hotels have converters and/or hair dryers)

*Small day pack or backpack

*Small flashlight

TIPPING: The following is a suggestion from both our Jerusalem and Amman office. Please note that this is a suggestion only and tips go by service given.

Guide \$9-10 per day per person

Driver \$6-7 per day per person

Meals \$.50 per person per meal

Porters \$1.00 per person in and same for out.